

## **“The Love Language of Christmas: God’s Touch”**

John 1:1-18

Dr. Jim Davis, December 24, 2008

First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

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It was just eight days before Christmas. The year was 1903. And that December day, on their fifth attempt, Orville and Wilbur Wright made their first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Minutes later, Wilbur rushed to the local telegraph office and sent this message. “We have flown for 12 seconds! And will be home for Christmas!”

The woman who received the telegram was Wilbur Wright’s sister Katherine. She took it to the editor of the *Dayton Daily News* and told him her brother was coming home. She asked the editor if he would like an interview.

The editor’s responded politely. He said “No.” He didn’t think an interview would be necessary, but he promised to put something in the newspaper. So on December 19th, the *Dayton Daily News* ran this byline on page six: “Wright Brothers Home for Christmas!”

The first flight of an airplane at Kitty Hawk was a huge story. But the newspaper editor missed it and chose instead to headline something else. So I wonder. Do you think we sometimes do something similar at Christmastime?

What I mean is this. Our trees are decorated. Our houses are too. Our presents are bought and wrapped. We’ve worked to get ready for tomorrow and now Christmas is almost here. But in the midst of it all, I know and I suspect you know too. Sometimes we miss the real story and end up headlining the wrong thing.

So this evening, I want to take time to remind us that the real story this Christmas is love, God’s love, for the world and for us. For the past few weeks here at First Church we’ve been thinking about that story, about the love language of Christmas. And the idea behind that phrase is really pretty simple.

Just as there are different languages in our world, psychologists tell us there are also different love languages, different ways people express love. Five ways, it turns out, are primary. Using words to affirm someone, giving them a gift, spending time with them, serving them, touching them; these are the five primary ways human beings express love.

And these are the same ways John says in his gospel, that God reaches out to love the world at Christmas. He sends His word to us, affirming our worth. He offers us the gift of life; not just physical life, but spiritual life and eternal life. He steps out of eternity to spend time with us. He serves us by sending us light to lead us out of darkness, even the darkness of poverty in Africa, as a young man named Richmond reminded us just two weeks ago. And then, and then, God reaches out to touch us, “and the Word became flesh.”

God expresses His love for the world at Christmas in every human love language. That’s the truth that the prologue of John’s Gospel proclaims. And that’s the message we most need to hear, every one of us who is here tonight.

In 1994, two Christian missionaries answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach English and Ethics in an orphanage outside Moscow. About 100 boys and girls who had been abandoned or abused were there in the orphanage, left in the care of the government.

It was December, and the missionaries decided to tell the boys and girls the Christmas story. It would be the first time these children had ever heard the story of the birth of Christ. The missionaries told them about Mary and Joseph who arrived in Bethlehem and found no room in the inn. They told them about the couple deciding to stay in the stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in the manger.

Then, when the story was done, they gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make their own little mangers. Each child was also given a piece of brown paper and a square of yellow cloth. Following instructions, the children tore the paper into strips and put them in the manger for straw.

The yellow cloth squares, cut from a worn-out nightgown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia was used by each child for the baby’s blanket. As a last step in their manger construction project, the children were invited to come up front to a table to pick out a tan felt baby Jesus and place him in their manger.

It was all going smoothly until one of the missionaries sat down at a table to look at the manger that had been made by a 6 year old boy named Misha. He had finished his project. But when the missionary looked at what he had done she was surprised to see not one but two babies lying in the manger. Quickly, she called for the translator to ask Misha why there were two babies in his manger.

Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at the manger, Misha began to repeat the story he had heard. For such a young boy, who had only heard the Christmas story once, Misha related it with surprising accuracy until he came to the part where Mary laid the baby Jesus in the manger. Then he started to ad-lib.

He said, “And when Mary put the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no mamma and no papa, so I didn’t have a place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I couldn’t, because I didn’t have a gift to give him.

I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift. So I asked him, “Jesus, if I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?” And Jesus said, “If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody could ever give me.”

Then Jesus reached out his hand and took my hand and helped me crawl up into the manger. And we lay down together and he told me I could stay with him-for always.”

When Misha finished his story, tears began to brim in his eyes. He put his hand over his face and his head dropped to the table. But a moment later he lifted his head and smiled. For that night the love language of Christmas had been spoken to him and Misha had heard it. He had felt God’s hand and the touch of God’s love in his life and he had received it, accepted it, and responded to it.

Have you ever felt the touch of God’s love? I hope so. It’s so important, so incredibly important to have that experience, to not only hear the word that God speaks to us at Christmas but feel the touch of God’s love.

Max Depree isn’t a Russian orphan. He’s an American CEO and the author of a book on corporate leadership called *Leadership Jazz*. The company he heads up has been named one of *Fortune* magazine’s “most admired companies” for the past eighteen years. But Max is also a grandfather and in the prologue to *Leadership Jazz* he wrote about an experience in his life when he felt the touch of God’s love. It happened this way.

“Esther, my wife, and I have a granddaughter,” he wrote, “She’s named Zoe. It’s the Greek word for life. She was born prematurely and weighed one pound, seven ounces.

She was so small that my wedding ring could slide up her arm to her shoulder. The neonatologist who first examined her told us that she had a 5 to 10 percent chance of living three days.

When Esther and I scrubbed up for our first visit and saw Zoe in her isolation crib in the neonatal intensive care unit, she had two IVs in her navel, one in her foot, a monitor on each side of her chest, and a respirator tube and a feeding tube in her mouth.

To complicate matters, Zoe's biological father had jumped ship the month before she was born. Realizing this, a wise and caring nurse named Ruth gave me my instructions.

'For the next several months,' she told me, 'you're the surrogate father. I want you to come to the hospital every day to visit Zoe, and when you come, I want you to rub her legs, her arms and her body with the tip of your finger. While you're touching her, tell her over and over how much you love her, because she has to be able to connect your voice to your touch.'

God knew, my friends that we need to connect His voice to His touch too. So the Word became flesh. And God's great desire this evening is to reach out and touch us, each of us, no matter where we are, no matter what condition we might find ourselves in.

Some of you who are here are truly joyful tonight. And God's great desire is to touch us and make your joy complete. There are others here tonight that are worried or frightened or frustrated or sad. And if one of those words or something like it describes you, then realize this.

God's great desire this evening is to reach out and touch you. He has not brought you here simply to listen to my voice. He wants to speak His word to you and He wants His word to become flesh for you. He wants you to feel His touch tonight so that you can know beyond the shadow of a doubt that He loves you no matter what's happening in your life and that He will be with you this Christmas Eve and always.

All of us tonight are really here for one purpose; to hear God's voice and feel God's touch. That's what Christmas is all about and that's why this table is set in front of us, because this is one of the places where each of us can truly feel God's touch.

“Take and eat,” Jesus said, “this is my body and it’s given for you.” Jesus wants to reach out and touch you. It’s why He came. It’s why the word became flesh on the first Christmas Eve and it’s why we take communion on this Christmas Eve.

We do it because Jesus wants to touch us. We do it because we believe that Christ has the power to reach His hand across more than twenty centuries and touch each one of us here tonight with God’s great love.

How will you experience His touch? What will it feel like for you? I don’t know but I do know this. If you are willing to receive the touch of God’s love in Jesus Christ, you will feel it tonight as we eat this bread and drink this cup.

But remember, the touch of God’s love is an amazingly tender touch. It will not force itself upon you. It will only offer itself to you. For after all, it is a touch of love. And when it offers itself to you, it will be up to you. For when God reaches out His hand to touch you or me, He is only hoping for only one thing. He is hoping that His touch and His love will be received.

Let’s pray ...